

join my colleagues in welcoming to this Chamber the Prime Minister of the State of Israel, Shimon Peres. Mr. Peres journeyed to the United States to help us pay homage to our friend, the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, and to demonstrate the unity that exists between our two nations. As he addresses this joint session of Congress, we express our appreciation to Prime Minister Peres for his willingness to make this important journey on behalf of the people and State of Israel.

The voice of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has been silenced. Hatred took from our midst a strong leader who believed that the time had come to seek peace in the Middle East. Yet, we gather today with a renewed sense of commitment to pursue peace in that region. It is, indeed, the highest tribute we can pay to Yitzhak Rabin.

Mr. Speaker, the man who addresses us as the new Prime Minister of Israel, Shimon Peres, has served his nation with distinction and honor. He brings to the post a record of distinguished service in office, and the highest level of commitment and integrity. Prime Minister Peres is a strong leader to whom we pledge our full support.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of our Nation's longstanding and close relationship with the people of Israel. Our historic and mutually beneficial relationship is a testament to international cooperation. Indeed, it exists as a model for all peace-loving nations of the world. During this period of mourning for the slain hero, Yitzhak Rabin, we remain committed to that relationship.

In the United States, we applaud President Clinton for his continued leadership in the quest for peace in the Middle East. He has demonstrated America's strong support for this effort, and he stands beside his brother, Shimon Peres, offering a strong arm of support. The leadership of these two individuals and their courage in the pursuit of peace should be encouraged by all Americans and Israelis.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the residents of the 11th Congressional District, I take pride in welcoming Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres to Washington. As he comes before us, we take this opportunity to again convey our condolences during this time of mourning for Yitzhak Rabin. We hope that Prime Minister Peres will carry back to the people of his nation our words of comfort and support. Our support is extended in the spirit of brotherhood and unity.

BREATHITT COUNTY STATE CHAMPS

HON. HAROLD ROGERS

OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 12, 1995

Mr. ROGERS. Mr. Speaker, last week, many high schools around the Nation won high school State football championships. But, none were more exciting than Breathitt County, KY's 42-35, 2OT victory over Franklin-Simpson in the Kentucky 2A State football championship.

The Bobcats, whose program is one of the strongest in the State, won their first State championship ever while fishing the first undefeated season—15-0—in the school's long history.

And they won it in thrilling, heart-quickenning style.

Trailing by as many as 14 points, the determined Bobcats, led by quarterback Waylon Chapman, stormed back several times, climaxed by a 90-yard drive which tied the score in the game's final minutes.

After matching scores in the first overtime, the Bobcats faced a fourth down play from the 16 yard line. After a scramble, Chapman's pass fell into the hands of a sliding Phillip Watts in the corner of the end zone.

After a short gasp, the covering official signaled touchdown sending the Bobcats and their faithful into a frenzy.

But, it wasn't over. Franklin-Simpson had one more chance to win.

After two plays, the stiff Bobcat defense forced a fumble and recovered it to clinch the victory. and, then the real celebrating began.

Stunned and emotionally drained, Coach Mike Holcomb captured his team's thoughts best. "It's a great feeling for this community," he said. "They poured their hearts out for this team."

Yes, it is wonderful for this great community, but it is even a bigger accomplishment for the fine young athletes at Breathitt County High School. They never quit. Their determination, commitment and perseverance is something everyone in this country can respect with pride.

Coach Vince Lombardi, in his immortal speech, "What It Takes To Be Number One," said, "I firmly believe that man's finest hour—his greatest fulfillment—is that moment when he was worked his heart out and he's exhausted on the field of battle—Victorious."

The Bobcats have been to the top of the mountain, and as ABC's Keith Jackson would say, "Oh Nellie," are we proud.

GIANT HEALTH NET H.M.O. SUES COMPANY THAT GIVES IT A BAD RATING

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, December 12, 1995

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, the movement to managed care is sweeping the country, and it is vital that patients know whether the HMO's and other organizations they are being asked to join provide quality care or are financially sound.

A bad sign for consumers is the lawsuit of giant Health Net HMO against the tiny rating firm of Weiss Ratings, Inc. Health Net claims that Weiss' analysis of Health Net's very shakey financial status—a "D—" rating—was harmful to the HMO.

Mr. Speaker, the law suit smacks of intimidation. The financial data was very clear. At the time of the rating, Health Net was in bad shape. Weiss has an excellent reputation for spotting companies in trouble. Customers and investors have a right to know. If lawsuits like this succeed in silencing the analysts and critics, there will be no competitive marketplace because the consumer will have no hope of making an informed decision. Ignorant customers don't make good customers—and Health Net's lawsuit is an effort to keep the public ignorant. The problem is, ignorance in picking a health plan can cause customer bankruptcy or even death.

Enclosed is a portion of the New York Times article of November 24, 1995, that describes the kind of anticonsumer lawsuit that Health Net is pursuing.

[From the New York Times, Nov. 24, 1995]

RATING AGENCIES FACING LAWSUITS FOR LOW GRADES

(By Michael Quint)

Rating agencies that grade the financial strength of companies and local governments are accustomed to lawsuits by investors who say that the ratings failed to alert them to serious problems. But the agencies are not used to being sued by the entities they rate.

Now that is changing, as agencies ranging from the giant Moody's Investors Service in New York, a unit of the Dun & Bradstreet Corporation, to tiny Weiss Group, of Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., are learning that they are vulnerable to suits from companies or governments who say that their ratings were so low as to be libelous.

Rating agencies defend their right to publish opinions as a matter of freedom of the press, regardless of whether they were hired to issue the rating.

But in two current disputes, one by the second-largest health maintenance organization in California and the other by the largest school district in Colorado, rating agencies that issued unsolicited ratings were accused of using their reports to drum up business.

Unsolicited ratings can become an issue when companies and local governments that paid to be rated wanted to choose the agencies that they thought would give them the best ratings, testifying to their strength. If an unsolicited rating was much different from what the company thought it deserved, sparks could fly.

Malik Hasan, a doctor and chairman of Health Net, a California health maintenance organization, said a D— rating by Weiss "made us into their poster boy." Mr. Hasan said that Weiss used the rating to attract attention and sell more of the agency's reports. Late last year, after Weiss gave Health Net the lowest rating of any of the country's 13 largest H.M.O.'s, Health Net filed suit in Federal court in Los Angeles accusing Weiss of interfering with its business, and of defamation, slander and libel.

Martin Weiss, chairman of the rating agency, said he had spent more than \$350,000 of his own money defending the agency against the lawsuit and was in no mood to back down. "I am fighting to the bitter end, because if I cave in now, the word would get around that the way to get a better rating or to shut up Weiss is to sue him," he said.

Although Mr. Weiss has sold only 21 reports about Health Net, he hopes that H.M.O. ratings will raise his company's revenues above the \$764,000 total for 1994. The financial ratings of H.M.O.'s were important, he said, because the groups were growing and "a group that is under financial pressure could be more likely to cut corners on medical care."

Concern about his reputation led Mr. Weiss to reject a compromise settlement proposal a week ago, because it would not have made clear that Mr. Weiss did not pay any damages to Health Net, nor would he have been able to talk publicly about the case.

Dr. Hasan of Health Net said he was pushing the suit because the criteria for Weiss ratings remained secret and put too much emphasis on measures of financial strength that did not accurately reflect the ability of his company to pay the medical costs of its 1.4 million customers in California.

Mr. Weiss defended his rating formula, saying it was similar to one being developed by state insurance commissioners for H.M.O.'s.